

# Legislative short session kicks off Monday | Olympia

- by DENNIS BOX, Covington Reporter Editor
- Jan 7, 2016 at 9:00AM

The state Legislature rings in the 2016 regular session Monday under the capitol dome in Olympia.

This year is a short session with adjournment scheduled for March 10.

The 60-day session is designed for adjustments to the state budget , while the long sessions of 105 days is for writing the biennial budget.

In 2015 the House and Senate found itself hanging out in Olympia for the regular long session plus two special sessions tacked on to finally come to a budget the two chambers and Gov. Jay Inslee could live with for a couple of years.

The Office of Financial Management released Inslee's supplemental budget for the upcoming session stating in the document, "The primary focus of his (Inslee's) 2016 supplemental budget is to cover spending increases needed to continue delivering services at current levels, cover caseload and enrollment increases, and pay for emergencies and other costs not anticipated when the budget was approved in June. Beyond that, his budget meets a handful of high-priority needs, especially for vital mental health services."

Inslee stated the state revenue forecast has increased by about \$245 million, but it doesn't cover the increase in expenses that checks in at \$700 million.

One of the most challenging issues facing the 2015 legislators was the State Supreme Court McCleary decision, which found the state in contempt for not fulfilling its state constitutional obligation of funding schools.

Despite staying in Olympia until July 10, the members could not come up with a school funding solution to satisfy the Supreme Court. The court handed down an unanimous decision Aug. 13 stating, "the State of Washington is assessed a remedial penalty of one hundred thousand dollars (\$1 00,000) per day until it adopts a complete plan for complying with article IX, section 1 by the 2018 school year."

The court order opened noting, "The Washington Constitution imposes only one 'paramount duty' upon the State: "to make ample provision for the education of all

children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.”

In imposing the fine the nine judges wrote, “As it has since the constitutionality of Washington’s school funding system was first litigated in Seattle School District, the court assumes and expects that the other branches of government will comply in good faith with orders of the court issued pursuant to the court’s constitutional duties. Seattle Sch. Dist. 1, 90 Wn.2d at 506-07. Our country has a proud tradition of having the executive branch aid in enforcing court orders vindicating constitutional rights.”

The legislative leaders have met since August but a plan to follow the court order has yet to be released.

Working out a budget plan to fund public education that will get the state out from under the contempt order will likely top the agenda for the session.

### **Session calendar**

January 11, 2016 First Day of Session

February 5, 2016 Last day to read in committee reports (pass bills out of committee and read them into the record on the floor) in house of origin, except House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees.

February 9, 2016 Last day to read in committee reports (pass bills out of committee and read them into the record on the floor) from House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees in house of origin.

February 17, 2016 Last day to consider (pass) bills in house of origin (5 p.m.).

February 26, 2016 Last day to read in committee reports (pass bills out of committee and read them into the record on the floor) from opposite house, except House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees.

February 29, 2016 Last day to read in opposite house committee reports (pass bills out of committee and read them into the record on the floor) from House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees.

March 4, 2016\* Last day to consider (pass) opposite house bills (5 p.m.) (except initiatives and alternatives to initiatives, budgets and matters necessary to implement budgets, differences between the houses, and matters incident to the interim and closing of the session).

March 10, 2016 Last day allowed for regular session under state constitution.

\* After the 54th day, only initiatives, alternatives to initiatives, budgets and matters necessary to implement budgets, matters that affect state revenue, messages pertaining to amendments, differences between the houses, and matters incident to the interim and closing of the session may be considered.

In 2015, the Legislature was in session from January 12 through April 24. The Legislature was in special session from April 29 to May 28, May 29 to June 27 and June 28 to July 10.[2]

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